

Funding Unites UA College of Nursing and MHC Healthcare to Battle Arizona's Opioid Crisis

UA Nursing Professor Rene Love's passion for bringing health care to rural and medically underserved communities is bolstered by an \$821,171 grant from the Health Resources and Service Administration.

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TUCSON, Ariz. – [University of Arizona College of Nursing](#) Clinical Associate Professor [Rene Love](#), PhD, DNP, long has had a passion for bringing health care to rural and medically underserved communities.

Her latest funding, an \$821,171 grant from the [Health Resources and Service Administration](#) (HRSA) for her [Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training](#) (BHWET) program, takes that passion to the next level by partnering UA researchers and students with [MHC Healthcare](#) (MHC) in Marana, Ariz. The College of Nursing and MHC will pool their resources to increase the number of psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners (PMHNP) Doctor of Nursing Practice graduates prepared to meet the needs of Opioid Use Disorder (OUD), a problematic pattern of opioid use that causes significant impairment or distress.



Considering the [Pima County overdose rate](#) in 2016 was 21.9 per 100,000 population, an urgent need exists to address the problem. The fact that overdose rates have increased 18 percent from 2010-2016, with fatal overdoses making up 13 percent of total cases handled by the medical examiner, only underscores the need for action. The partnership with MHC will enhance the battle against Arizona's opioid crisis in several ways.

"We're not only going to train our students but we've got some funding to help train more of MHC's staff in medication-assisted treatment," Dr. Love said. "MHC will get some funding to hire a nurse practitioner to help provide services for

patients, and oversee these students and partner with us to help develop educational components for the students and faculty.”

UA College of Nursing students have been placed at MHC for several years, but until now it always has been a sporadic “one-student-at-a-time” situation. Thanks to the HRSA funding, a total of eight UA nursing students – four per year for two years – will receive their critical training in substance abuse and opioid addiction at MHC.

“The partnership with the University of Arizona College of Nursing is a very special opportunity to simultaneously achieve multiple shared aims through collaboration,” said **Jon Reardon**, MHC chief of clinical behavioral health, and **Avni Patel Shridharani**, MHC chief strategy officer, in a joint statement. “First, we will be able to offer more Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) services for people in our community who are battling Opioid Use Disorder.

“These grants targeted opioid use disorder high-needs communities, including Pima County,” the statement continues. “What makes the project unique is that MHC Healthcare will be able to offer medication assisted treatment services within our whole-person model of compassionate, high-quality care that includes medical, behavioral health, lab, pharmacy, physical therapy and dental services. “We believe that this ‘one-stop-shop’ approach will ensure that patients have the best chance of a meaningful recovery. Second, the program will enable MHC to serve as a training site for UA DNP psychiatric mental nurse practitioner (PMHNP) students. The PMHNP students will serve patients alongside teaching faculty at MHC in an integrated team-based model that will prepare them for today’s health-care delivery model upon graduation. Lastly, MHC hopes to meet its own future clinical staffing needs by being able to recruit graduates of the program to become primary care providers at MHC Healthcare.”

Dr. Love’s project has three goals: To improve access to care in rural and medically underserved communities in Arizona through new and enhanced partnerships that integrate primary and behavioral health care to educate psychiatric mental nurse practitioner students in opioid and substance abuse treatment during their clinical training; to improve behavioral health treatment techniques through education and clinical training with new partnerships; and to increase the number of psychiatric mental nurse practitioner graduates trained in opioid and substance abuse treatment by providing behavioral health workforce education and training to students who will practice in rural, border and medically underserved communities.

Dr. Love said the impact of the training will have swift and far-reaching effects. “Until now, our students have lacked access to directed clinical experiences with opioid addiction,” she said. “Once these students graduate they will be ready to

provide services wherever they practice. This also impacts patient care for the community because MHC will be able to train more of its staff from the grant funding we've secured. Our students receive training and more patients will have access to these services in the Tucson area."

About the University of Arizona College of Nursing

Established in 1957, the University of Arizona College of Nursing has been transforming nursing education, research and practice to help people build better futures for more than 60 years. Consistently ranked among the best programs in the nation, the college is strengthening health care's largest workforce and the public's most trusted profession through its undergraduate and graduate programs, offered online and on-campus in Tucson and Phoenix. Headquartered in Tucson, Ariz., where integrative health has been pioneered, the UA College of Nursing is home to the world's only Integrative Nursing Faculty Fellowship. With key focal strengths in integrative health, cancer prevention and survivorship, and nursing informatics, the college has more than 7,000 alumni worldwide promoting health and wellness in their workplaces and communities. For more information: www.nursing.arizona.edu

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